

Slavery today



How many people are enslaved worldwide?

It is estimated that around 12 million people are enslaved worldwide (report from the International Labour Organisation, 2005). The actual figure may be much higher because a great deal of slavery is hidden. Some estimates put it at over 20 million. The largest numbers are in poor Asian countries and Latin America. However, it is thought that some 350,000 people are enslaved in industrialised countries. Many of the victims are women and children.

What forms does slavery take in the modern world?

Here are some examples:

- Bonded labour or debt bondage**
 This has existed for centuries in countries like India and Brazil and is still very common. A person borrows money or gets into debt. They are forced to work to pay off the loan. However, the wages are so low and the interest rate on the loan so high that they never pay it off. Even worse the debt can be passed onto the parents' children so they end up working all their lives to pay off a loan which might originally have been quite small.
- Forced labour**
 People are kidnapped or tricked into going to a remote area to work. Usually they are very poor and desperate for a job. Once they get there they are forced to work long hours for next to no money. They can't leave because they are too far away from anywhere or they are forced to stay by men with guns.
- Sex slavery**
 Women and children are often the victim of people traffickers who kidnap, buy them or lure them with promises of good jobs and put them to work as prostitutes. Thousands of women have been brought into Western Europe from poorer Eastern European countries to work in brothels or on the streets.
- Domestic servants**
 Huge numbers of children and young women are often forced to work as domestic servants, often being sold when they are very young. This is common in south Asia and Africa, e.g. Africans often end up being servants in countries like Saudi Arabia.

What are the reasons for modern slavery?

The main reason is poverty. There is a huge pool of poor people throughout the world who are powerless and have no jobs. Because of changes in the world many of these have drifted to the outskirts of large cities. They can easily be exploited and used by those who want to make profit out of them. Another important reason is that governments allow slavery to go unpunished even though it is illegal everywhere. Sometimes this is because of corruption or because governments don't want to offend business people, sometimes because they are just not interested and have no respect for people's human rights. Modern slavery is part of the globalised world. It is a huge business in which enormous profits can be made from areas like agriculture, mining, construction and prostitution.



Human Rights Codes

The text below is a simplified version of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, developed after World War II in an attempt to prevent the worst kind of inhuman acts such as genocide and slavery and to set out a range of positive rights which all peoples should ideally have. European countries have agreed to a legally binding version of this international code called the European Convention on Human Rights.



Below is a summary of some of the main rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:



The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- 1 All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
- 2 Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms in this declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
- 3 Everyone has the right to life and liberty.
- 4 No one shall be held in slavery.
- 5 No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- 6 All are equal before the law.
- 7 No one shall be subjected to arbitrary (unreasonable) arrest, detention or exile.
- 8 Everyone is entitled to a fair trial, in public.
- 9 Everyone accused of a crime in a court of law is presumed innocent until proved guilty in a public trial in which they have a right to defend themselves.
- 10 No one shall be subjected to interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence.
- 11 Everyone has the right of freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state, and the right to leave and return freely to their country.
- 12 Everyone has the right to seek asylum from prosecution in other countries.
- 13 Men and women of full age have the right to marry and found a family without limitation due to race, nationality or religion.
- 14 Everyone has the right to own property.
- 15 Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- 16 Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- 17 Everyone has the right to meet freely in peaceful organisations.
- 18 Everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country.
- 19 Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, and to equal pay for equal work.
- 20 Everyone has the right to rest and leisure.
- 21 Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.
- 22 Everyone has the right to an education. Education shall be free and compulsory.
- 23 Everyone has the right to take part in the cultural life of the community.